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E. Faber

FAMOUS MEN

OF CHINA.



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The
Famous Men of China,

BY

Rev. Ernst Faber, Dr. theol.

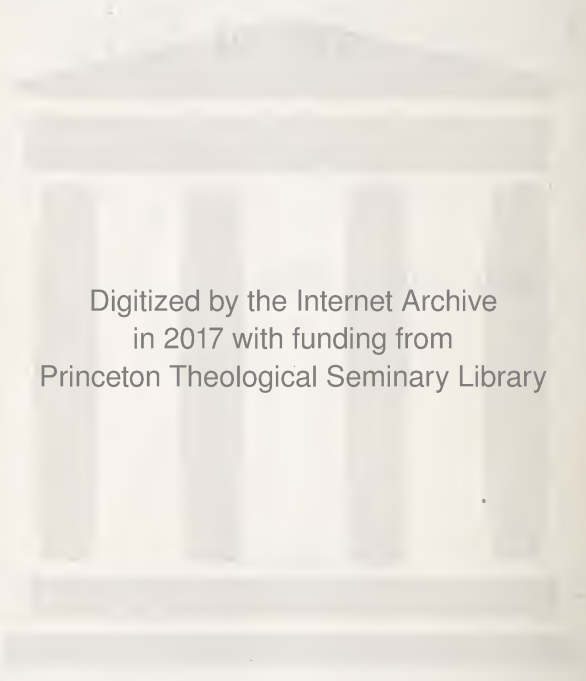
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SHANGHAI:

Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge
Among the Chinese.

1889.



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The Famous Men of China.

FAME rests upon report and may be good, bad or indifferent. It refers to the character of the object as distinguished in one way or another. Fame is a public mark of distinction—it is the expression of public opinion in regard to the character of certain persons. Though fame may be limited perhaps known only to one class of men, or it may be confined to the next neighbourhood, yet even within the narrowest boundary the character of a man must surpass every other man around him before he can become famous. This superiority of character must further be acknowledged by the judgment of those who know of the person. The famous men of China are famous by the voice of China. This voice of China is conveyed to us by means of the current Chinese literature. In the popular Chinese literature known to every Chinaman able to read we have the expression of Chinese public opinion and we know that in China public opinion is neither formed in a few days nor is it passing by in a few years; it is a continuous stream already lasting for more than 2000 years. The millions that have passed this life during so many years may be compared to the sand a gold washer uses; the sand is washed away and the few grains of genuine gold

remain. Their famous men are to China such grains of gold in the sand of time. We have however to keep in mind that fame is not identical with historical truth; fame is a creation of public opinion and opinions may be right and may be wrong. Opinions show sentiment formulated in words. As such they cast an indirect light upon the mode of feeling and thinking of the Chinese. Thus we shall be justified to find Chinese moral and religious sentiment brought to light through the famous men of China. This is to us of higher value than the most accurate knowledge of the facts of Chinese history. Various duties call upon us to study the Chinese mind. In the famous men of China we find revealed not only the national mind but also the national heart of the Chinese. Hence we get hold of a method highly conducive to a right understanding of Chinese history by which we may gain a mastery over Chinese difficulties and arrive at some facility and success in our dealing with common Chinese affairs.

The famous men of China have influenced Chinese history and still exert more or less influence upon the Chinese mind. They are more powerful than the laws and institutions of China, for they are the expression of the inner feeling of the educated classes of China. It is a common mistake made by foreign writers on Chinese history to confound the rulers of China with the state, forgetting that the emperor is but part of it, and so everywhere else in many cases the mere puppet or circumstances. Chinese public opinion shows no respect to persons; everybody is treated as he deserves, consequently few names of kings and emperors are found among the long list of famous men, as not the position of a man, nor the splendour surrounding him, but his influence on Society is taken into account.

Foremost amongst the Famous Men of China stands

CONFUCIUS.

He is the Chinese of the Chinese. The facts of his life are well known. It is also known that according to the laws of China there must be a Temple of Confucius attached to every Prefecture, Sub-prefecture, District, and in every market town throughout the empire. Each Temple must consist of three courts which generally follow in line from South to North. (For detailed description see Watter's Guide). Confucius is not worshipped as a god. Prayer is not offered to him, nor is his help or intervention besought on any occasion. Legal punishment is even inflicted on those who venture to do such. It is also forbidden to set up an image of Confucius in any temple, Buddhist or Taoist, and even in his own only tablets are set up for worship. The ceremonies used at his service are the same as those used in the Temples of kings and emperors. It is not as king however, but as their great *teacher* and *pattern* that the Chinese worship their Sage. Highest reverence is due to Confucius, they say, because he first made learning accessible, taught the way of virtue, and settled the laws of social and political order. "No day," say the Chinese "can pass without an experience of the benefits derived from Confucius, and his influence among men is like that of Heaven and Earth in the world."

Next to Confucius are placed the names of four associates, among whom are the authors of "Great Learning", of the "Doctrine of the Mean", and Mencius. Then come the "Twelve Wise Ones", all of them distinguished disciples of Confucius except the twelfth who is *Chu-hi*, the great commentator and metaphysician, who lived about 1500 years after Confucius. Along the sides of the court there are the tablets of the Former Worthies,

79 in number, most of them personal disciples of Confucius; outside of these there are two other rows together of 65 tablets of Former Scholars. This gives a total of 161 famous persons to whose memory worship is paid at least twice a year in about 2,500 places of worship all over China. The expenses are fixed at Tls. 80,1065 a time. Of many of the 79 "worthies" nothing is known but that they have sat at the feet of Confucius and received the Master's instructions. They are supposed to have taught the doctrines of Confucius and thus helped to establish Confucianism in China. It is certain that in modern times only those are admitted to a share in the honours of Confucius who have elucidated the teaching of the Chinese Canon and transmitted their own accomplishments to other generations. We have to acknowledge that the temples of Confucius differ from idol temples. In the idol temples people seek the realization of their own carnal wishes. All of them therefore have a deteriorating influence on the moral character of the worshipper. In the Confucian temple the pattern of virtue is exhibited in 161 different types, and in Confucius himself is found embodied the Chinese ideal of virtue, Chinese character in its most perfect form. This is the idea of the Chinese term for Sage, 聖人. The term signifies not only intellectual excellency but a superior character without any blame or imperfection. (For details see my digest of Confucianism and the Mind of Mencius). Greatest respect shown by a nation to moral character and to its ideal of human perfection would have our Christian approval if it were not combined with bloody sacrifices, thus going far beyond the limits of respect allowed to mortal beings. It is a fact that through the influence of Confucius and his followers the idea of one true God still recognisable in

the ancient canonical literature of China has become obscured and lost sight of more and more. Thus Confucius is to a degree responsible for the obstinate idolatry and superstition of his numerous adherents.

Another trespass to be noticed in the Confucian temples, is the worship of the ancestors of Confucius and of his associates. This is done on no higher ground than that they are the natural producers of their offspring. Thus we find nature-worship still a feature in the highest ideal of humanity the Chinese have been able to produce.

Next to Confucius in fame and importance stands

LAO TSE.

He has no place in the temple of Confucius, but enjoys many temples of his own all over the Empire. Lao tse has been made a real *idol*. He is one of the three images in the Taoist Trinity, Though Lao tse lived as a real human being, a contemporary of Confucius, only 40 years older than the latter, his devotees regard him now as the incarnation of a star god. Naturalism is the essence of Lao tse's doctrines. The best of his followers have striven after immortality with the intention to escape passing through the gate of death. The worst of his school became materialists pure and simple.

Mediocre minds incapable of accepting one of the two extremes, kept in the golden middle and practised magical arts. Though many Taoists are enumerated among the famous men of China they are not united in one Temple. Though there are thousands of Taoist temples in China some variety is found almost in every temple. One of the most famous of the early Taoists—though I never have seen a temple in his honour—is the philosopher *Chuang* the author of the *Nan hwa* canon. He is the husband of the "wife tested." He is, moreover, perhaps

the greatest metaphysician China has produced. His style is picturesque but the paradoxical is prevailing. The modern higher style of Chinese composition is full of allusions to classical sayings of Chuang. There are the

EIGHT IMMORTALS,

or Patriarchs of Taoism of which images are seen almost every-where in China. (The eight Immortals of the wine-cup are different beings—they were not Taoists, but famous drinkers during the T'ang dynasty who received their name from a poet.) Thousands of immortals are mentioned who are said to have bodily ascended up to heaven, some of them carrying off wife and children with them—a few succeeded even in taking dogs and chickens up to heaven. These immortals may reappear in different forms and are worshipped and asked for help by many devotees. Stories about them are numerous—we may call them the *fairy tales* of China.

But even in this fantastic superstition there is a true idea lying at its bottom, viz. that life and immortality are essential to perfect human destination, and that sickness and death are the results of bad living, of transgressing the laws of nature. As Taoism, like Confucianism, however, lost sight of the ONE true God, the world is confounded with God. Life and immortality are essentials of the nature of God, not of man. Man requires participation in the nature of God, and full harmony with the laws of God to ensure life and immortality. The Taoists made a caricature of an eternal truth.

Many Taoists are famous as magicians. In magic also there is an idea of truth and high value. It points to the superiority of mind in regard to matter. In the absolute sense only God is spirit, or mind superior in every respect to material nature. In God His will, even every thought of His, is law to nature, and His mind is the executive

force. Man has to conquer nature gradually by studying its laws. In her laws nature, or we may say, matter, shows a spiritual side, and allows our mind to use the material forces in his service. Only in CHRIST we see the identity of the human mind with the divine. His miracles are consequently the natural result of His character as God-man. The Taoist magicians have lost the truth, and produced instead ridiculous superstitions.

Of Buddhist famous men

SHAKYAMUNI

is a foreigner, as also the eighteen Lo-han (patriarchs, Arhan or immediate disciples of Buddha). Neither they nor any of their most prominent followers have become as famous as Confucians and Taoists have. There are some mentioned as painters or as excelling in caligraphy, some even as warriors or rebels, but none as a popular saint or as an influential author, though Chinese Buddhism can claim many persons of high accomplishments within its sacred walls. We find in this fact an indisputable proof that Buddhism is, after all its successes in two thousand years, still something foreign to the Chinese mind. The Chinese are not Buddhists as it is often stated. There are many Buddhist establishments in China, but the Chinese mind is little influenced by it, except perhaps that the Buddhist notion of hell and its various torments was adopted. Metempsychosis is as much Taoist as Buddhist. It was in India, pre-Buddhistic, a belief of earlier Brahmaism. We may consequently regard it as an ancient Asiatic belief. How different is the relation of the European nations to the Semitic religion Christianity. How familiar are we, from early childhood, with the foreign names of those ancient heroes of our Bible, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Elijah, Peter, Paul, &c. There

is nothing similar in China in regard to the heroes of Buddhism.

The largest group of the rest of famous men is that of
AUTHORS.

Those of the orthodox school have their leaders in the Temple of Confucius. But there are many other famous authors who do not share that honor. They live nevertheless in the Chinese mind.

For example, Mih-tse 墨子, the leader of the Socialists, and author of an interesting work still in existence. He may however be included in Taoism, as it was the case in ancient times with all originators of heterodox, i.e. non-Confucian, Systems (See my Article on the Historical characteristics of Taoism in the *China Review*.)

There is *Sün Tse*, 荀子, the opponent to Mencius in regard to human nature, Mencius teaching that it is good, Sün-tse that it is evil. Sün-tse had his tablet in the Temple for a time, but it was removed 1530, together with a number of others. Many of the scholars of the Han dynasty showed a leaning towards Taoism, as Leu Hiang 劉向 and Yang Hiung 楊雄; others showed a critical tendency as Wang Chung 王充. (See my Systematical Digest.) Many other good scholars of the Sung dynasty and of more recent times, are excluded because of their opposition to the doctrines of Chu fu tse 朱夫子, the great favourite of Emperor K'ang-hi. This opposition is however gaining ground and an animated controversy is raging between the two Confucian schools, reminding us of the "*rabies theologicum*" in Christian countries. The number of Writers on Chinese history is also not small. Several of them have places in the temple of Confucius. There are many more, among them not a few who have written not mere chronicles, but well digested histories. It is to be regretted that among foreigners

only certain compendiums are known, wherein the emperors are identified with China, the fact being over-looked that in China the great ministers are more important factors of history than the emperors, very few only excepted. The eminent Scholars are of importance too. China has not been altogether in a stagnant state. Its institutions have undergone remarkable changes, its laws have been altered, its relation to foreign countries and to neighbouring states has not remained the same, etc.

PHILOSOPHICAL WRITERS.

A few of this class are famous among the Chinese, as under the name almost every study is included except that of the Sacred Scriptures and of history. We find metaphysics, medicine, agriculture, industry, (silk, paper, ink, tea, etc.,) music, etc. Books of fancy, which play such a conspicuous and important part in Western countries, are little better than despised in China. That dramatic writings for the stage should take the first place in literature among civilized people is an absurd idea to the Chinese mind, though we might congratulate ourselves if, in Christian lands, only the deepest and best productions of the mind were regarded as good enough even for amusement. That writers whose works give offence to moral feeling should find a place among Classical literature, is justly regarded by the Chinese as a certain indication of an inferior state of morality.

POETS.

Of famous poets China also has its share. Several of them were famous wine-bibbers too (see G. C. Stent's translations.) One of the earliest writers of poetry is K'ü-yüan who drowned himself. In his memory the dragon-boats festival is held every year all over China (Mayer 326).

SCIENCE AND ART.

Of Science, understood in the sense of a systematic arrangement of truths and facts known, combined with an examination of the principles and laws of mind and matter, the Chinese have scarcely an idea. They have made not a few valuable observations and practical discoveries, especially in ancient times, but have never shown a truly scientific spirit, for undigested facts and isolated truths cannot be called science. Not one branch of science has ever been in any way advanced by the Chinese. The Chinese mind resembles in this respect, not the Aryan, but the Semitic type, though the Arabians in the Middle Ages certainly surpassed the Chinese in their scientific treatment of Mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine. These are however almost the only sciences somewhat cultivated by the Chinese. But they were not discovered in China. The Chinese have had Arabian helpers and before them perhaps Buddhist Indian teachers. The very first notion of Astronomy seems to have been brought with the calendar from Chaldea. Three hundred years ago the Jesuits gained much influence at the court of China by their Mathematical and Astronomical knowledge. The Emperor K'ang-hi himself became their pupil. A number of good translations were added to the Jesuits' publication by the Protestant Missionaries. In spite of all superiority of Western science the Chinese maintain their own ground, and continue a school of old-fashioned Chinese Mathematicians. On the other side there is a school following the foreign method, and a third which attempts a combination of Chinese and foreign methods. Each of the three schools boasts of a number of famous men. We regard this a sufficient proof that all well-meant attempts to graft modern Western science on the Chinese mind must result in failure. Though China is

adopting Western methods, it is done urged by necessity, in order to gain the advantage of the most striking results of Western science, not from any love to science.

All the famous Chinese physicians and all writers on medicine are so far uninfluenced by foreign science. Not a few native medical writers are well known, if not famous in China, and some physicians have gained great reputation. A few persons have distinguished themselves in the line of agriculture. Others have become famous by great works for the public or as artisans and inventors. The list of famous painters (see the illustrated 歷代名人畫譜 4 vols, a recent Shanghai publication,) begins with Mr. Ku about 300 A. D. and contains above one hundred famous names. Mr. A. Wylie in his "Notes" p. 110, mentions a work wherein more than 1500 Chinese painters are enumerated. Besides these painters there are other persons famous as calligraphers. Of famous musicians and their performances, wonderful stories are told. Even Confucius felt a sort of enchantment in listening to a great master of art and his state of ecstasy continued for three months, Lun yü vii, 13. We can only regret that all great Chinese musicians died many hundred years ago, thus the privilege of ever hearing one of them will be denied to us. Those interested in the subject may find interesting legends of upwards of eight hundred famous Taoists, among them many physicians and some musicians in the Mirror of Immortals, 神仙通鑑 22 oct. vols.

FAMOUS MINISTERS.

Of these are enumerated at least twenty times more than famous emperors and kings. Many are renowned as politicians and statesmen, others as wise counsellors, some for faithfulness, others for firmness, for uprightness, integrity, justice, devotion, wisdom, kindness. A few became

famous by their wickedness. Some of the best ministers received after all their good services evil reward and died in banishment or under the hand of the executioner. (See Mayer's Chinese Reader's Manual and the Chinese literature mentioned in its Introduction, and Wylie's Notes.)

To a foreigner who knows the Chinese only from the moral sentiments contained in a translation of the Classics it will be astonishing to find among the famous men a great number of *Rebels*. It is a curious fact that almost every new dynasty of the forty new dynasties that ruled over the whole or over a part of China originated in rebellion against a former dynasty. The rebel-leaders succeeded, completely or in part, and were consequently recognised as superior men. Those rebels who failed in their enterprise—and Chinese history knows a great number of them—are denounced as the worst sort of criminals. This shows us that not a moral standard is applied, but merely the superficial consideration of success. It implies that a king has in China a right to his throne only as long as he is able to defend it and that any subject may rise against the government in power if he has a chance of success.

Surprising is the great number of famous

GENERALS.

They were, almost without exception, victorious leaders of expeditions, either against native insurgents or against foreign invaders, or carrying Chinese arms across the Chinese frontiers into the neighbouring states. (Comp. 歷代名將圖 2 vols. containing short biographies and illustrations of one hundred famous generals from the Chow dynasty to the end of the Ming.) In spite of the moral teachings of Confucius and his school against warfare, the Chinese have had war almost continuously from the most ancient times to the present

day. The Chinese, as a rule, are fond of reading well written accounts of campaigns, The HISTORY of the THREE KINGDOMS is the most popular book, we may say the "*Robinson Crusoe*" of China. On theatres, fighting scenes are considered the most attractive, and fighting goes on among the people and b'oody battles are fought among vil agers. We all know that one of the popular heroes of the Three Kingdoms was canonised by an Emperor of China, about 1100 A. D., and is now worshipped in every village and in almost every house of China, as the GOD OF WAR. His popularity far exceeds that of Confucius. We may call this KWAN-TI the modern *National god* of China. He is worshipped to fight the evil spirits, and to help, in general, against all kinds of evil. His image is to be found not only in households, but in special temples and in almost every Taoist and in every Buddhist temple as well. Is not this a rather ominous fact that the *three Chinese religions* now unite—if we may not say culminate—in the "GOD OF WAR?" By this worship the Chinese practically and emphatically confess that model teachers as Confucius, Lao-tse and Buddha are not sufficient to satisfy human need. A superior power is required to supplement our human infirmity and fight the battle for us. Here again great religious truth is recognisable though distorted into a caricature. This GOD OF WAR is not sent from GOD as the saviour of mankind, he came not down from heaven to bring men up to heaven—he was a mortal being who suffered death by the hands of the executioner. It is very strange indeed, that he who lost his head, and was buried without rising again, should be worshipped universally in China and a somewhat omnipotent power be attributed to him. What a strange similarity and striking contrast between Christ crucified and the god of War beheaded!—Most of the

other famous Generals have also temples and sacrifices therein, but commonly only at one place or at a few localities. Such veneration of warriors among the Chinese is the strongest evidence that the Chinese mind is eminently warlike. The facts to the contrary repeated over and over by foreign writers in general works on China—though such facts are true—have their cause not in the Chinese mind, but in other circumstances, of which I only mention: inferior weapons, lack of drill, bad organisation, want of provision for wounded and invalids, absence of thoroughly educated officers, and the universal corruption of mandarins. ———

PARVENUS (OR UPSTARTS.)

A very interesting sort of characters are those who made their way from low positions up to the highest honours in China. In all such cases superior talents, if not a genius, can be pre-supposed, and also a strong determination of character combined with moral qualities. We cannot but admire men who made their way against all difficulties that beset them and, leaving millions of fellow-men behind, reached the culminating point of human ambition. A few names only can be mentioned here:—

Sin Pang the founder of the Han Dynasty, who started as common peasant and ascended the throne of China B. C. 202.

Liu Pei, a seller of straw shoes, became Emperor A. D. 220 of one third of China, in the time of the THREE KINGDOMS.

Liu Yü, a seller of straw sandals, became Emperor A. D. 420, and founder of the former Sung dynasty.

Li Sze-yüan a deserted orphan child, became Emperor A. D. 925, and founder of the After T'ang dynasty.

Chao K'wang Yen, Son of an official, became Emperor A. D. 960, and founder of the great Sung dynasty.

Chu Yüan-chang, son of obscure peasants, who entered a Buddhist monastery, because he had become an orphan without means of support, became Emperor A. D. 1368 and founder of the Ming dynasty.

Far more numerous are of course those persons who advanced to the place of Ministers of State; for example, one had been a dog-butcher, another started as cook, another had been swine-herd, one began his career as a travelling merchant, another as a cart driver etc., etc. (see Mayer's Manual.) That very poor boys, by persevering study, became sooner or later, distinguished if not famous, scholars not a few of them gaining first honors in the competitive examinations, is a well-known fact. There is perhaps no other country in the world, the United States of America only excepted, where genius has so much chance as in China. In the United States, the President fortunately takes his seat only for four years, thus his rivals have another opportunity at the end of that short period. In China, the ambitious man has to fight his way and cannot hope to see his ambitions satisfied till hundred thousands of his country-men have shed their blood on the way to his throne. We all remember, and may still see the traces not far off, of the great T'AI-P'ING REBELLION, when about ten millions of Chinese were sacrificed to the fanatic ambition of a poor elementary teacher. Though he had some knowledge of the truth, he was far from being a Christian character. I should not be surprised to hear of similar attempts before long.

My last group of famous men of China are those that became distinguished by exhibiting social virtue of an uncommon degree. Foremost among these are the patterns of filial piety. Best known, are the twenty-four examples of which short biographies with illustrations are published as a popular tract. Another edition con-

tains one hundred examples. The ideal exhibited in these publications amounts to absolute submission to the authority of parents, and parents-in-law, not on moral grounds, for most of the stories are absurd, but on a mere despotic basis. Parents may do as they please, children have only duties and no rights. The ancient "Canon of Filial Piety" is, in this respect, superior to these modern productions, for we find in the canon the duty inculcated that sons should admonish their parents if they are wrong, and keep them, if possible, from doing anything wrong.

A few persons among the famous men are distinguished for friendship one to another, and some as good brothers.

There are also a few fathers famous for having several distinguished sons and one case at least is on record where a father killed his own son who disgraced himself by lewdness. Such cases are, however, nothing uncommon in modern China even among the common people.

Very few husbands became famous for devotion to their respective wives.

I did not mention travellers, because they are only famous among foreigners, not among Chinese; nor any mythological beings, though a number of them are regarded as famous men of antiquity.

My short survey of the famous Men of China is now finished. I regret that I could not dare, for want of time, to give more interesting details; but I hope that some of you will pay more attention to this subject in future. Man and his character will always remain the most fascinating subject of study—the Chinese are one branch of mankind, and we ourselves form another branch.

A better acquaintance with the famous men of China may not only be of intellectual profit to us, but also stimulate every one of us to strive after the best gifts and to

develop such a Christian character as is in no way inferior to the best the Chinese have produced. "History," says Dionysius of Halicarnassus is "philosophy teaching by example." The superior efficacy of example to precept is acknowledged among the Chinese as universally as among ancient and modern Western nations. In their famous men the Chinese see all the laws of morality and rules of conduct verified by experience. Though our conception of morality, based on the Christian religion, is higher than theirs, it will not strike the Chinese mind till we are able to show that Christian morality is not an abstract notion, but real life; and that it is taking individual form in producing various excellent characters. The Gospel we preach is not in words only, but in power of the Spirit, and it tends to education not only of good men and of good citizens, but of men of God and inheritors of an eternal kingdom.



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